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ABSTRACT

This discussion of the Basic Skills Improvement Program (BSIP) formulated by the United States Congress strongly urges educators to develop programs that demonstrate the effectiveness of teaching basic skills in a comprehensive curriculum integrating reading, writing, speaking, and mathematics. The major functions of BSIP are explained as screening program ideas submitted, validating the effectiveness of promising practices and processes among elementary and secondary school students and functionally illiterate adults, and coordinating basic skills efforts at the federal, state, and local levels. Plans for dispersing the funds budgeted for the program and the process for submitting project proposals for funding are outlined. The last section of the paper discusses the implications that BSIP may have for already existing basic communications programs and defines key issues in developing programs in the future. (AEA)

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Implications of the 1978 Basic Skills Legislation for Communication Programs: A view from The Federal Level

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SPEECH

by Shirley A. Jackson
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Those of you who have worked for the Government--whether at the local, State or Federal level--know how gratifying it can be to be given responsibility for implementing a piece of legislation which responds intelligently to a very real problem. With the inclusion of the Basic Skills Improvement Program in the Education Amendments Act of 1978, we have been asked to launch a nationwide effort which the public wants and for which it sees a compelling need.

I don't mean to appear to be one of those overly enthusiastic bureaucrats who see in a funded program the answer to all our problems, for I have been in Washington just long enough to know that there can be in the Federal process some painful disappointments. But if you will allow me some measured enthusiasm, I think it fair to say we have been given a fine opportunity to do something important in an area that needs attention badly. And I think we are in a strong position to achieve some successes, not only because of our experience over the past eight years with Right to Read, but also because of widespread public support, particularly from parents who want something done about the basic education of our young people and about the needs of our young adults.

The needs which the Basic Skills legislation addresses must give all of us the most serious concern.

I don't think anyone involved in this effort should see in the new legislation a panacea--as the solution to a very complex problem. It will take time and intense concentration of effort and resources to resolve the problem.

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We in the Basic Skills Improvement program are very aware of this. We are also aware of another fact which needs pondering, and that is simply that "Back to Basics" has become a slogan which doesn't always mean the same thing to different people. For some, it is shorthand for the demand that schools drop what appears to be frills and concentrate their energies on teaching the young to read, to do math, and to speak and write at a minimum level for some. Those of us who are in the midst of the basic skills improvement effort see good reason to be concerned about those who would concentrate on "minimums" or even "maximums" in the basic skills at the expense of other learning experiences. The basic skills improvement effort can be hurt by the expression of such concerns, because the problems of illiteracy and undereducation are linked to the total program of a school and not simply to the quality or lack of it in the basic skills part of that program. Basic skills, as you are well aware, cannot be developed in exclusive isolation from the rest of education. This message must be carried into the community. Every school system must identify the educational needs of its students, establish the objectives of the school after a careful analysis of those needs, and then make certain that the community-at-large understands and accepts those needs and objectives. A basic skills program is developed in a meaningful way when it is carefully related to and interrelated with the other needs and objectives of the school program. I stress this because I think we in education have a tendency to take on our agenda piece-by-piece, and in doing so to do harm to our overall efforts. It is our view, then, that children will achieve competency in the basic skills to the extent that those skills are understood by the school and community-at-large to be a part of the total educational program and are coordinated with that program.

Let me now turn to an explanation of the Basic Skills Program as Congress has formulated it.

The reading program has not been supplanted by the Basic Skills program. Support for reading will continue. But we now have expanded authority to deal with the problems of illiteracy and undereducation, and that enables us to focus also on the basic skills of mathematics and communication, (both oral and written).

The addition of those skills was inevitable. While reading, writing, oral and written communications, and arithmetic can be and is taught and learned separately, they are in a larger sense inseparable. A school cannot single out one for attention and ignore the others. Literacy in a modern society means a thorough grounding in the total spectrum of all of the basic skills.

For this reason, the Basic Skills Improvement program will stress the support of efforts which demonstrate the effectiveness of teaching the basic skills as a comprehensive, integrated program.

As with Right to Read, the Basic Skills initiative will be primarily a demonstration program. The Congress did not intend that it be a service program (like Title I, Handicapped, etc.) with a view to providing a large amount of sustained assistance to all or even needy school districts. Rather we are being asked to test the validity of ideas and to demonstrate the effectiveness of promisin practices, processes, products, and programs in meeting the full spectrum of basic skills needs among our elementary and secondary school students and functionally illiterate adults. We have a relatively small budget ($35 M) but we expect to make a large impact by working through carefully orchestrated demonstration, assessment, and dissemination mode. This means we are looking for projects with the capability to demonstrate effective skills improvement and coordination programs.

But we also are expecting a large impact by implementing a major requirement of the new law--coordination of basic skills efforts at the Federal, State, and local levels. This coordination component of the law responds to the recognized fact that education programs are too often isolated from other efforts, and are scattered and fragmented.

At the Federal level, the former U.S. Commissioner of Education has responded to the coordination element of the law (Title II: Section 210) by establishing a USOE Steering Committee for Basic Skills Coordination composed of 20 OE programs which have a major concern (program focus and money) for basic skills instruction. The committee, which I chair, will establish effective and efficient procedures for coordination

of OE basic skills programs with the end target being designing ways of coordinating all available basic skills resources at the local and State levels; thereby improving available instructional resources for children, youth and adults.**(Section 210-Title II mandates this coordination)**

There will be $20 million for Part A: the national program which will be used in the following ways:

(1) Grants and contracts totalling $7.5 million to demonstrate improved delivery of instructional services in reading, mathematics and oral and written communications under Section 205 of Title II. The targets for these services are elementary and secondary school students. Eligible applicants are public or nonprofit private agencies, organizations, or institutions.

The Law says programs under this section must include assessment of schoolwide needs of all children in all of the basic skills; establishing learning goals and objectives for individual schools; developing comprehensive programs to address needs with a combination of State, Federal and local funding resources; demonstrating ways to improve basic skills by coordinating the activities of various institutions and agencies in basic skills;(coordination targets: planning, instruction, staff development, evaluation, record-keeping, monitoring, administrating, **and reporting**); preservice for aides and volunteers and inservice training for teachers, aides and volunteers to improve their ability to teach basic skills; and helping education personnel to improve their ability to recognize and utilize basic skills resources already available;

(2) $6 million for grants and contracts to involve education agencies, community organizations, public and private organizations in tutorial programs; basic skills instruction outside of the school (reading academies); community activities to stimulate basic skills improvement; and programs for lending or selling books (all of these for either children, youth or adults); (Section 208 of the law); However, the focus of the instructional programs will continue to be on out-of-school youths and adults from age 16 up, in alternative educational settings.

(3) Grants and contracts totalling $2 million to encourage parental/volunteer participation/assistance in improving basic skills by working with the school. (Section 206 of Title II); (Materials development and training for parents to encourage them to assist their children at home);

At the State and local level coordination is encouraged through a program of grants to States for State leadership efforts. Agreements with States will involve the award of flow-through grants to the localities from the State and a State leadership program. They must have as a major ingredient a plan for coordinating the efforts of all basic skills programs, whether they be Federally, State, or locally funded. These agreements will take into consideration the actions already underway in the States and allow each State to review and revise what has been done or, if that seems the logical next step, to move ahead, building on what has already been accomplished. There is no set of requirements, beyond the law, for these agreements; our emphasis is on encouraging States to coordinate their basic skills efforts on the assumption that many of those efforts have often been developed in isolation from other efforts. Our job with these State agreements is to support and augment what is already underway.

A total of $7.75 million has been allocated for the State Agreement Program:Part B - Section 222)--one half of the allocation to the States must go to local education agencies for basic skills projects (for which you may apply directly to the State) and one-half for State Leadership efforts (Section 224). States must submit statewide basic skills improvement plans to our office by January, 1980 in order to qualify for the money under Part B. Instead of forcing each State to submit a plan that conforms to a national design, we have instead asked each State to develop its own unique comprehensive plan describing what the state has already done about improving basic skills, what it plans to do, how, and what results it expects.

The other major efforts of the Basic Skills Improvement Program are under Part C: the Inexpensive Book Distribution (Section 231: RIF - $6.5 M) and Special Mathematics Program (Section 232: $750,000).

Educational Proficiency Standards (Title IX: Part B) was designed to provide grants to State and local programs to use achievement testing to improve basic skills. It calls for grants to help students achieve "levels of educational proficiency compatible with basic standards established by LEAs and SEAs. Congress does not plan to fund this program.

Those of you who have worked in or with a Federal Demonstration Program know how difficult the process can be and how important the outcome can be. Essentially the Congress has said through this legislation that it recognizes a lack in education which needs correcting, and the best approach to correcting it is to identify promising programs, to demonstrate their effectiveness, to carefully evaluate them and then to disseminate the results of those which have proven worth. It is a complex matter, made more so by the fact that we are expanding our programmatic concern from reading to two additional skills--math and oral and written communications, and we are expanding our student concerns from elementary grades to the high school along with our out-of-school youth and adult education efforts. That is a far larger world in which we are now obliged to move, involving a far wider range of educational needs, of students and of professional personnel. What we are hoping for is that we will receive some of the best ideas existing in the field. The final outcomes of the program will, of course, in some degree, depend on how we in Washington administer this legislation; but those outcomes will depend far more on the quality of the proposals submitted and on the sophistication and knowledge of those who we are able to attract to run the projects.

The review process is fairly simple in outline. A final regulations program announcement will be published in the Federal Register in mid-December establishing a proposal deadline date of February 28 for receipt of proposals. We then convene panels of readers, drawn from suggestions given to us by national organizations such as yours, universities, local and State educational agencies and others, who rate the proposals by the published criteria. The results of the panel deliberations are reviewed by the program and a list of proposed projects for funding sent to the Secretary of Education (or his/her designee) for approval. Potential

projects are negotiated through the contracts and grants office and our program. The Congress is notified of the results and then the successful applicants are notified. We expect to announce the results in June. This will give the funded projects time to organize themselves for the beginning of the Fall 1980 academic year.

The law allows us to fund programs up to four years. We plan to take advantage of the section especially in cases of Section 205 in-school and Section 208 out-of-school proposals of unusual promise. For such four-year proposals we will use the first year primarily for planning and the initial implementation; the second and part of the third years for implementation, and part of the third and fourth for evaluation and dissemination. Such grants will not be automatically renewed; their continued funding will depend on clear evidence that these projects are meeting their objectives and are carrying out their proposed demonstration activities. But after the initial proposal has been approved we will not be asking for further submission but only for periodic reports describing progress made. These projects will be carefully monitored on-site by the National office and carefully documented by the project so we will not only know what happened but can replicate it.

We are well aware that this process will try the patience of some. We receive tremendous pressure in Washington for immediate results. But our experience has proven that demonstrations of one year simply do not give projects time to come up with results important enough to justify the investment, at least in instructional areas of such importance as the basic skills. We need to allow sufficient time to have the project fully planned, implemented, evaluated and assessed and to have the results systematically disseminated to other educators with the same or similar needs. Those of you who have run projects know how difficult evaluations which render statistically significant impact data can be; carefully designed evaluations, however, are essential to the success of a Federal demonstration program, and the results can be lost if we do not give time to designing and carrying out a dissemination plan.

Let me now turn to some matters which directly concern you and your discipline. As I indicated earlier, the basic thrust of this legislation is to encourage the coordination of resources on behalf of the basic skills. Under certain parts of the legislation, we will be supporting projects in each of the disciplines, but the major effort will be to encourage proposals which include all of the four basic skills and focus on integration of all of the communication skills and coordination of all programs to avoid duplication overlap and waste.

Section 205 under the national demonstration component of the Basic Skills Legislation is designed for both elementary and secondary school children. These proposals should include each of the four basic skills, unless the needs assessment shows that the need for a particular discipline has been met and is being maintained. We are encouraging proposals which take a comprehensive approach to identifying needs of a whole school, and discouraging piecemeal approaches, which is to say those which address the needs of only a few students in only one or two of the basic skills.

I realize that this comprehensive approach is far easier to accomplish at the elementary school level than it is the secondary. High schools have the Carnegie units to deal with and as a consequence we have departments of English and math, etc. with their own curriculum and discipline. And while most high schools have elective oral communications programs, few have required regular instructional programs in communications that are a required part of content instruction. Nevertheless, it is our expectation that a high school interested in participating will, after a careful assessment of the needs of its students, submit proposals which bring together the four basic skills and demonstrate effective approaches to the education of all students in communications skills, along with the others, in content areas as well as in English or Communications electives.

If, then, you are interested in participating in this program (developing a proposal), you should begin by working with your school principal and with your colleagues in the other basic skills, first, in assessing the needs of your students and then in developing a response to those needs which will show promise of replication in other school settings.

As to the target audience under the Section 205, we have in mind the in-school youths at the elementary and secondary school levels. While we are obviously concerned in this program with those young people who have very real handicaps in their education, we will only entertain proposals which focus on the full range of basic skills improvement. We plan to have a balanced distribution of funded proposals among the elementary and secondary schools. (Approximately 50/50)

The Section 208 out-of-school program will focus primarily on an instructional program which will largely resemble the Reading Academies under the Right to Read program. While those activities will take place in alternative, out-of-school settings, those who will conduct them will include school systems and State education agencies, as well as not-for-profit government and community agencies. The targets for this program will be primarily out-of-school youths and adults (16 years and over), although programs will be supported which would provide the basic skills for in-school youth in a non-school setting, can support whole family instruction, intergenerational literacy programs, the strategy is spelled out in guidelines for which you may write.

Again, for those of you who are interested in submitting a proposal under Section 208, you should work as a team with your colleagues from the other skills and in other types of programs. Under Section 208, the program, as well, cannot focus on one of the skills but must focus on all of them and coordination.

As to the State Leadership program totalling $7.75 million, you should contact your State basic skills coordinator to learn about the plans which are being formulated. The plans should emphasize the oral communications skills along with others and provide for a leadership training program in math and communications improvement programs. Each State plan, before it is funded, must be approved by the Governor and it must be published for public reaction, your reaction. The public

must be given 60 days in which to submit responses. This would give you a good opportunity to make your needs known, but I would suggest that you immediately contact your State Department of Education Basic Skills Coordinator concerning your intrests and needs so they get addressed immediately. The State can also tell you how they will handle the grants that they will have available under Section 222 and when and how they will announce and select projects.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

PREMISE

Society demands a high level of communication competence for success (educational, social, vocational). Communications skills are inextricably and naturally interwoven with each other and general verbal skills/ability.

ASSUMPTIONS

(1) Basic Skills programs already exist in all schools. The purpose of this legislation is to augment the effectiveness of what is through improved instruction and coordination of all existing resources.

(2) The State has the constitutional responsibility for education of its citizens, not the Federal government. Therefore, a priority strategy must be to strengthen the State's capability to deliver basic skills services.

MAJOR BENEFITS

(1) Seed money will be provided to develop communications models which highlight communications as an integrated part of the curriculum in elementary, secondary, youth and adult programs. This will stimulate many who would otherwise not develop such expanded basic skills programs. We will encourage local schools and other educational agencies to begin experimenting with and testing ideas and approaches to improve communications skills,

to document effectiveness and to install such programs throughout the school district.

(2) We will focus national attention on the needs and successes in communications program.

(3) We will encourage development of writing, speaking and listening programs in an even way within the school program. Sometimes there is no direct instruction provided in communication competencies. Most of it is done in sporadic, indirect instruction which is usually some part of another instructional activity as a group discussion, oral or written reports; i.e. informal communications --but not in a structured learning situation designed specifically to systematically teach language skills.

KEY ISSUES IN COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

(1) Identification of the complex of skills and competencies to be taught by the classroom teacher and those to be handled by a communications specialist if one is proposed. (role differentiation and means of identification and referrals).

Program focus should be on developing regular normal instruction in communications for all students in an organized manner. Stress is placed on the wide range of communication skills; educational, social, employment.

Focus should not be on minimum level skills but on a scope and sequence (taxonomy, hierarchy of skills) for all students at all levels and diagnostic instruction. Schools must consider where mandated how skills fit into their scope and sequence of skills and how they will be taught and reinforced within the regular classroom as well as with supplementary instruction.

(2) Staff development should be provided to teach regular classroom teachers, specialists and volunteers effective methods of teaching communication skill and how to integrate those with the content and other basic skills into the

regular program. Staff development should also indicate how supplementary programs can augment the effectiveness of the regular program.

Program Focus should de-emphasize add-ons of separate personnel/ and isolated skills areas. Emphasis on integration, coordination, interrelationships, fusion of content and process (skills) in the delivery of services of the focus.

(3) Assessment of Communications competencies by project and classroom teachers and the determination of what students should be able to accomplish in a communications program along with appropriate and practical techniques of assessing these competencies should be emphasized.

Key Questions:

What do you want to teach? How do you want to teach it? Who will be responsible for teaching what part of it. How do you plan to evaluate mastery?

Program focus: Assessments do not have to be standardized tests but must reflect the identification of content and skills to be addressed in the program and some way of determining a student's level of success in meeting stated objectives and expectations relative to mastery (criterion referenced, competency as well as norm referenced.

(4) Appropriate language development programs for minority students with varying backgrounds, experiences, values, and/or language styles; especially, bilingual students and Black youngsters must be addressed in a systematic manner and as an integrated part of the communications program.

(5) When? Instructional time to be spent on communications skills Instructional time must be allotted to sequential reteaching and reinforcing of developmental communications skills. There appears to be a decline in

instructional time devoted to this area as students progress through the grades.

Harris and Sipay say that, on the average, 5 hours per week in the 4th grade, 4 hrs. in the 5th and 3 hrs in the 6th are devoted to teaching developmental reading. With this regression it is scary to project what time is spent on developmental communications skills in total at the Jr. high and high school levels. Higher level comprehension skills (aural and reading) seem to deteriorate as students advance through the educational hierarcy. Research shows a definite relationship between time on task and achievement. Time for instruction and time for application of the communication skills are essentials for a successful program. The issue is where is this time coming from-is this new time, is it a redirection of existing time and activities?

(6) Where? Expansion of communication skills teaching to content areas

Subject matter materials are not only diverse but replete with abstract, technical language, unfamiliar syntactical writing styles, sematically confusing phrases and sentences-therefore-too difficult for many students to comprehend. Just as the reading load and content and concept density increases, there is a corresponding decrease in instructional time assigned to teaching these students to read and cope with curricular materials as mentioned before. Every teacher is not a teacher of reading at present even though that slogan started early 1900's. Every teacher is not even a teacher of content reading skills. Austin and Morrison (1963) reported that 25% of the schools they surveyed has no content reading instruction. Of the remaining

75 percent, content reading instruction was superficial and incidental at best. Additional evidence that content reading skills and learning processes are not taught is found in the 1971 and again in the 1975 National Assessment report on 17 year old in school youth.

(6) Expansion to content areas

Program Focus:

Where is the best place in the school's curriculum to fuse and infuse communications and content skills--research is fairly consistent in showing it is most effectively done at the jr. high and high levels when old skills are reinforced and new skills introduced in the context of meeting the various demands of content curriculum. (Roswell, Herber, Robinson, Nemeth & Shoemaker, Aukerman, Burmeister, Karlin).

It is definitely more efficient and effective in terms of teaching and learning to fuse the teaching of content matter knowledge with the teaching of the communications skills. However, when students are severly handicapped in the basic skills and need intensive instruction in the lower level basic skills such as decoding, how will their basic skills and content needs be met at the high school level?

To fuse or not to fuse--that is not the question. The question is how to get a total school committed and organized to accommodate the needed "communication skills fusion in the content" effort, schoolwide.

(7) Who should do what? Staffing...roles and relationships

What is the specific role and responsibility of each teacher and content area in relationship to developing the communication skills? i.e. What are the English teachers expected to do? Math? Science? Music? etc. What is the role of the various specialists working in the building and how are these

roles integrated with the classroom teacher's role to ensure one developmental program for a student receiving multiple services? Which students should get "special", pull - out attention or scheduled classes with specialists, if any? How is this type of program best arranged if it is arranged at all?

(8) Schoolwide Needs Assessment and Staff Development Needs; Organization, staffing, procedures

How is a comprehensive needs assessment going to be accomplished? How will the results be used? Who will make the decisions on what is needed, by whom? Priorities? Instructional strategies? Objectives of program? Student instruction? Staff development"

Who should be a part of the staff development planning team? Should the staff development program be voluntary? What should the staff development program cover (topics)? Who should present these topics? When? Where? At what cost? Should it be done by whole school or departments (at the secondary level)? or grades? or mixed? Which topics? Which programs can provide staff development, what parts can be handled by which programs? What kind of follow-up is necessary? Who will provide it? When? Will there be follow-up in class? Will it be rountinely scheduled or by teacher request only?

How will assessed school needs and priorities reflect mandated competency demands in the areas of staff development, instructional programs & assessment strategies.

How can all of the instructional entities in basic skills best be coordinated to provide the maximum quality in the delivery of instructional services to all of the students in the school?

Program Focus should be the coordination and utilization of all available resources. Inservice should address opportunities to learn about the new instructional behavior, observe the new behavior in a setting close to the one in which the teacher will function, opportunities for the teacher to demonstrate the behavior and get constructive feedback on the behavior. Inservice should be based on student needs. Administrator should be trained on organizing and managing a basic skills program.

To assist those interested in submitting proposals to understand the full complement of skills interested in a basic skills program should de-emphasize "minimum", our Office will include in our application packet a publication entitled "What Do We Know About Standards for Effective Basic Skills Program which includes a series of papers produced by various professional associations. The paper, given us by NCTE, is entitled "Standards for Basic Skills Writing Programs." These standards, and others in the booklet, were developed by a specially selected committee of teachers, supervisors, and writing specialists from the organization, for use by States and school districts in establishing standards for comprehensive basic skills improvement plans. It includes an operational definition of writing and lists characteristics of a basic skills program in writing. A separate paper prepared by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the Speech-Communication Association addresses standards for effective oral communication programs. For the reading standards the Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the IRA developed "Guide-lines for the Professional Operation of Reading Teachers." These include recommendations for specific academic preparation for reading teachers.

In addition to these standards we will send upon request, application packet guidelines for developing and operating instructional programs under Section 208. The application packages ~~will be~~ are being mailed ~~out the~~ last week in November, the final regulations will be published the middle of December.

Let me conclude my remarks by simply saying that you and I have been given an excellent opportunity to bring about a major difference in American education. We are relying on you to become involved and encourage you to seek ways in which you as individuals and as a professional association can make a contribution. Our success will depend on your ideas and the energy and intelligence with which you apply them. In several years we will be reporting to the Congress on our accomplishments. I very much hope that among them I will be able to show that we engaged the best of the minds of those professions most concerned in the basic skills efforts. And so I invite you to join with us in this effort, and in doing so extend an open invitation to each of you to continue sharing ideas with the Basic Skills Improvement Program, as individuals as an organization. We not only need your help and your guidance, we simply are not going to manage the reforms we seek without you.

Thank you for your kind attention.